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RADIATION SICKNESS BITS GDR URANIUM MINERS

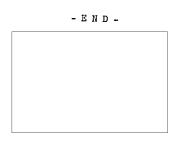
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A new disease, known locally as the "Schneeberg" sickness, from the Schneeberg uranium ore deposits, has now claimed its first victims in the GDR. The disease is a form of cancer, caused by the radioactivity of the ore. Nearly all miners constantly in direct contact with the ore veins underground are affected.

Since there is only one hospital in the whole area, which contains 20,000 forced laborers, there is no possibility of treatment for the disease. The workers are subject to Soviet military regulations and have no legal right to medical care. Workers who are ill can report to commissions which occasionally visit the mine region, and ask to be dismissed from their work. However, the commissions approve only applications of those who have been so badly affected by radiation cancer that they can no longer work efficiently, and who are not expected to live more than a few months. Even so, cases of workers dying while still employed in the mines have been recorded. Those dismissed cannot hope for medical aid, because as forced laborers they were not covered by health insurance, and because they are refused hospital care on grounds that they are beyond help.

The mines were already operating before World War II, but at that time, under the pressure of the miners' union, the government passed laws restricting the underground work to 2 days a week and requiring the wearing of protective clothing. No such regulations are being enforced today, because the functionaries at Aue receive output bonuses computed on the basis of the uranium production in the mines. The bonuses go not to the miners, who run the risk of illness, but to the functionaries in well-appointed offices, who never see the pitchblende except perhaps on freight trains which take the ore to the East.



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